

INFO LOG-00 AF-00 AID-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00 PDI-00
DS-00 EUR-00 FBIE-00 VCI-00 H-00 TEDE-00 INR-00
LAB-01 MOFM-00 MOF-00 VCIE-00 NSAE-00 NIMA-00 PA-00
FMPC-00 SP-00 IRM-00 SSO-00 SS-00 NCTC-00 DSAC-00
PRM-00 DRL-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 FA-00 SWCI-00 PESU-00
/001W

P 140803Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0040
INFO ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY VATICAN
AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH

C O N F I D E N T I A L HANOI 000771

STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2009
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KIRF VT VM
SUBJECT: VATICAN RELATIONS IMPROVE AS ARCHBISHOP KIET CONSIDERS HIS FUTURE

REF: A. HANOI 699
1B. HANOI 160
1C. 08 HANOI 1321

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Michael Goldman. Reasons 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. With President Nguyen Minh Triet scheduled to visit the Holy See in November, Vatican officials have told the Hanoi Archdiocese that they are bullish about normalizing relations. Local Catholic leaders are less than fully elated at the prospect, however, voicing suspicion over the GVN's intentions. Moreover, a source close to Hanoi Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet said that officials in the Archdiocese are pessimistic about Kiet's future and worry that he is now perceived by both the Vatican and the GVN as an obstacle. They speculate that the odds are even that the Archbishop would retire. After returning from the Vatican, Kiet spent the month of July in seclusion contemplating his future. END SUMMARY

VATICAN-GVN TIES WARMING

¶2. (C) Father Thomas Nguyen Xuan Thuy, Chief of Financial and Administrative Affairs of the Hanoi Archbishop's Office, stated that the Vatican believes that relations between the GVN and the Holy See are the best they have ever been and are bullish that some agreement can be reached to normalize relations during President Triet's upcoming visit with the Pope in November. Father Thuy asserted that the Papal calendar for November has been confirmed, and that President Nguyen Minh Triet will be granted a meeting with the Pontiff. Father Thuy speculated that if relations were normalized, the Vatican would choose to operate out of their diplomatic mission in Bangkok rather than immediately name a Papal Envoy to oversee a new Embassy in Hanoi.

¶3. (C) Father Thuy said that he and his colleagues in Vietnam's Catholic leadership remain suspicious, commenting that they have "been lied to by the Communist Government for over 50 years." He voiced concern that improved relations with the Vatican would enable the GVN to force local Catholics into silence in their long-running land disputes and would inhibit the local Church from expanding into education and health care. Vietnam's Catholic Bishops, according to Thuy, are afraid that the GVN would cease dealing with their concerns directly and instead work through the Vatican's Embassy, which might prove unsympathetic. During the recent visit of Cardinal Man and 28 other Catholic Bishops to the Vatican in late June, Thuy said the Holy See did little to assuage these concerns; instead, Bishops were instructed to keep land disputes from escalating.

WILL ARCHBISHOP KIET RESIGN?

¶4. (C) On August 10, the blog of a journalist close to the Vice Minister of Public Security claimed that Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet was planning to step down after the Pope criticized Kiet's handling of land protests in Hanoi last year. Father Thuy confirmed that the Archbishop had been complaining of stress and insomnia ever since the February visit to Vietnam of the Holy See Under-Secretary for Relations with States Pietro Parolin. After his most recent visit to the Vatican, together with Cardinal Man and his fellow Bishops, Archbishop Kiet spent the month of July in Ninh Binh Province recuperating from "health problems." Thuy said that the Archbishop was contemplating his future and said he believed there was a "50 percent chance" that the Archbishop would resign.

¶5. (C) Father Thuy insisted that the Vatican has not, and would not, directly ask Kiet to step down. Nevertheless, Father Thuy pointed to separate instances where the Vatican had hinted at its displeasure over Kiet's actions. First, during the February Vatican visit by Under-Secretary Parolin, Kiet was privately criticized for his handling of land disputes in Hanoi. Second, during their meeting with Pope this summer, Vietnam's Bishops were told to "make personal sacrifices, show restraint in all disagreements with the government, and to obey the law," which many took to be another implicit criticism of Kiet's role in the land dispute issues. Father Thuy said that rumors were spreading in Rome that Archbishop Kiet was increasingly viewed as the final obstacle to normalizing relations between the Holy See and the Vatican.

¶6. (C) Father Thuy speculated that it was possible the Archbishop could be appointed to a position in Rome as a way of easing him out of Hanoi, but he said that he believed that the Archbishop would rather resign than move to Rome. Thuy also said that that the Archbishop did not want to become a stumbling block to normalized relations. Further complicating the situation, Cardinal Pham Minh Man in Ho Chi Minh City will soon reach mandatory retirement age, and Archbishop Kiet -- if he stays -- would be the only possible successor. Given the well-publicized frictions between Kiet and GVN officials, there was real concern within the Conference of Catholic Bishops that the GVN would reject Kiet's appointment to Cardinal,

Thuy said.

¶7. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Ho Chi Minh City.

MICHALAK